

# The SUBSTITUTE BRIDE

an original play by max sparber



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# Rose Fedelia

*(A neat 19th century bedroom, with a four poster bed and looking glass. A cat, DINAH, sleeps near the window. It is early evening. ALICE enters the room, fuming, then crosses to the cat and lifts it into the air.)*

ALICE: *(Crossly.)* I grow very tired of the behavior of adults, Dinah, very very tired. Auntie Chelsea, and do you believe this? Auntie Chelsea complained that I was quite a little nuisance, and she's sent me off to my room! On this, of all days! *(Sadly.)* I couldn't help myself, you understand, I just couldn't stop laughing. I don't know why they want everything hush hush when Uncle Rowan begins to act that way, if he embarrasses them so much why do they let him at the whisky? I tried to hold it in, but I just about burst when he began singing that song about the Irish sailor. *(Alice sets the cat down. Thoughtful.)* They wouldn't dare keep me up here, would they? Uncle Thomas promised to be here at nine O'clock, and Uncle Thomas always brings such nice surprises. They wouldn't make me miss out on a nice surprise, would they? *(She begins to pace.)* But then, they might. They ignored me all the way through dinner, Dinah, not even a "How are your studies," or a "Is that a new dress?" Nothing but wine and talk, nonsense about politics and the price of tea in China — Nonsense that can be of no interest to a little girl like me. As far as I'm concerned, they all acted like complete monsters, put a little liquor in any of them and they turn wicked. So wicked, they might even forget a little girl's birthday! *(Alice bursts into sobs, poses melodramatically.)* I'm sorry Dinah. I thought I was angry, but I'm just sad. After all, it isn't every day that you turn sixteen. And isn't that supposed to be important? Aren't there supposed to be gifts, and friends, and a party? But none of it for me! *(Alice seats herself on the bed, leans down to pet the cat.)* I should send you downstairs, too, Dinah, so you can be with your new kittens. And then I shall be alone. If I die tonight of a broken heart, they'll find my body tomorrow, and then won't they be sorry?

*(Dinah escapes Alice, hides under the bed. Alice kneels down, reaches after the tabby.)*

ALICE: *(Growing cross)* Let's not play this hiding game now, Dinah, let's not. You'll ruin my stockings. *(Unable to find the cat.)* Dinah? Oh, Dinah, you've lost yourself under the bed! So little of what goes under there ever comes back out. I've lost all the dolls from my childhood; all kinds of tin play toys, all those books on mind benders. If I've lost you too, I won't be able to stand it! Oh, I must find you!

*(Alice lies down on the floor, pulls herself partway under the bed. At this moment, her closet in the corner opens, and a small band emerges: Four MEN in black caftans, with long beards and silk hats, and their faces are skulls painted and gilded. One has a clarinet, one a violin, one with an accordion, and the last carries a base fiddle. They enter PLAYING. Behind them comes OCTAVIO BLUME, a foreigner with a cruel face.)*

ALICE: *(Crossly.)* If you don't come here now, Dinah, I'll spank you! And won't that embarrass your kittens! What is that noise?

*(All cross to the bed, kneel and peer underneath. Alice comes out from under, and is startled.)*

ALICE: Oh!

OCTAVIO: Grab her. Now.

*(The musicians take Alice by her elbows, lift her onto the bed)*

ALICE: What is this? What are you doing?

OCTAVIO: Saboteur! Tell us where you have hidden it!

ALICE: I'm sure I don't know what you are talking about. I've hidden nothing, and your behavior is horrible. Unhand me!

OCTAVIO: Explain yourself. Why were you hiding?

ALICE: I beg your pardon, but I wasn't.

OCTAVIO: She lies! Search the room!

*(The musicians set about searching the room, turning everything over in the process.)*

ALICE: You mustn't! Please don't, you're just damaging everything!

OCTAVIO: You don't fool me. Your dynamite would have done worse. Come here, Raoul, and tell us what you think.

*(One of the musicians crosses to Alice, looks her in the face. Alice pulls back, frightened.)*

MUSICIAN: Astonishing. She could be a twin of the bride.

OCTAVIO: Exactly! You echo my thoughts.

ALICE: Please, I can't bear to look at you!

MUSICIAN: She's hardly a pleasant little girl.

OCTAVIO: The criminal-type seldom is.

ALICE: Sir, What are you accusing me of?

OCTAVIO: It seems obvious to me. No one knew we were to be here, and yet we find you hiding under the bed. There can be no explanation, except that you mean to do us violence.

MUSICIAN: There is no dynamite in the room, Master Composer.

OCTAVIO: Then it must be hidden on her body. *(Octavio raises his hand, approaches her. She draws back.)*

ALICE: Touch me and I'll scream! I will not be molested by strangers!

OCTAVIO: Scream all you like, I will have the band play and they will drown you out. *(He gestures and the band plays.)*

ALICE: Keep away! I won't stand for this! *(She pulls away, rushes for the door.)* Don't come near me!

*(Octavio continues to follow her, and Alice backs out toward the door. She runs full into a woman, ROSE FEDELIA, who waves sheet music.)*

ROSE: My goodness! Haven't you got sense, girl — look where you're going!

ALICE: Please let me past, I am being pursued.

ROSE: By whom? By Octavio? What nonsense, he's harmless!

ALICE: He doesn't seem to be, if you'll excuse my saying.

ROSE: With his heart, any excitement would have him turning blue and crawling on the floor. *(To Octavio.)* Tell her you meant her no harm.

OCTAVIO: If I had discovered she meant to damage you, Rose, I would have beat her senseless. The Queen of Melody must be protected!

ROSE: I don't understand, why would she wish to harm me?

OCTAVIO: There are those who are plotting to disrupt the wedding, Rose. They will stop at nothing, even explosives!

ROSE: *(To Alice.)* Can this be true? I always thought I was well loved by children, I never thought they meant me any harm. Can it be that you do not like my music?

ALICE: I do not think I am familiar with your music. Once a month I visit the Bath pump house with my family, and we hear the orchestra there, but your name is unfamiliar to me.

OCTAVIO: There, Rose, an obvious lie. The girl would have to be buried in a hole to not be aware of the song stylings of Rose Fedelia, the Queen of Melody.

ROSE: Perhaps she is making a joke. I cannot believe she is unfamiliar with the songs of Octavio Blume.

OCTAVIO: No, how could she be? My songs are masterpieces.

ALICE: I think you are an awful man, and if you write songs I think they must be awful too!

OCTAVIO: There, she is making a fool of herself. No man is more celebrated than I am, I practically define my craft, and each song I write is better than the previous. Rose, tell this little idiot about my new song, which I delivered to you this morning.

ROSE: Its horrible, Octavio. I meant to ask you about that.

OCTAVIO: (*Startled.*) Did I mishear you, Rose? I think it's the finest I've written.

ROSE: Then you have lost your mind. I cannot bear it, and I won't sing it.

OCTAVIO: This is a cruel joke! Please, Rose, sing it with the band once. I know it's very modern, but the ears grow accustomed quickly. Don't be too quick to judge.

ROSE: It's the most awful thing ever!

OCTAVIO: I insist it is my masterpiece.

ROSE: Then we must sing it for the girl, and she'll be the judge.

OCTAVIO: What are you saying? The girl is here to disrupt our rehearsal. She cannot be trusted!

ROSE: What nonsense. Why would she want to do that?

OCTAVIO: Look at her, Rose! She could be the double of the kidnapped! I tell you, we should never have become involved with these Nihilists! These Anarchists! These Mad Bombers!

ROSE: Octavio, your heart! The gentlemen you refer to are paying us well, and they were your friends to begin with!

OCTAVIO: (*Shrieking.*) Yes, so who would know better than I? Brother will kill brother, blood will run to the drains, one death will be equaled by another, and this girl will be at the center of it all!

ROSE: Octavio, calm down! You're in a ghastly mood, and I'm afraid it will kill you! Look again, you'll see you're mistaken: This girl looks nothing like the bride. You're just putting on this show to protect your hideous composition, but the child will set us straight. (*To Alice.*) What is your name, dear?

ALICE: Alice, if you please.

OCTAVIO: No one is pleased.

ROSE: Shush, Octavio. The music begins!

*(Octavio Blume SHUSHES Alice, finding a seat himself. Rose takes her place among the band, and they start to play a melancholy tune.)*

ROSE: *(Singing: IN WITH THE BOYS)*  
I don't go for the same things they do  
As much has been made painfully clear  
They make no motions to invite me to their meetings  
Or teach their handshakes, or keep me near.  
I've been insulted for acting mannish  
A girl as pretty should have poise  
I should wear perfume, and not like boxing  
But it's enough for me to be in with the boys.

I'm quite aware they're uncomfortable with me  
They've asked me not to tag along  
But I'm making lists of their phrases and sports cheers  
And I'm writing down their fraternity songs.  
I've begun to suffer academically  
The botany lectures seems so much noise  
I've been locked out of my sorority room  
But it's enough for me to be in with the boys.

For a while I saw Jimmy Stylus  
We attended the formal, and he let me drive  
But he was accused of being unmanly  
And a week without him has stretched to five  
My few girlfriends give me lipsticks and compacts  
But they seem silly and useless toys  
My makeup smears at the races, anyway  
And it's enough for me to be in with the boys.

*(Throughout the song, Alice stirs, uncomfortable. Now the music stops, and the musicians BRAVO.)*

OCTAVIO: Thank you. You see, Rose, the band thinks it's rather fine.

ROSE: That's all very well. *(Points at Alice)* But what did you think?

ALICE: I can't say I much liked it.

OCTAVIO: This is nonsense.

ALICE: The harmonies sounded all higgelty-piggelty, and weren't the lyrics sort of *mean*?

OCTAVIO: Well! You're being quite the little nuisance, Miss Uppety-up.

ROSE: Octavio. I happen to agree with her. What were you saying about the lyrics, dear Alice?

ALICE: It's just that, I don't know who the girl is in the song, but I don't think that I would like her if I met her.

ROSE: Of course not, and that's the problem. People listen to music to get a moment's relief from the woes of living, not to be reminded of them by some coarse woman who will not wear lipstick. I shan't use this song, Octavio.

OCTAVIO: I can't believe you're listening to the opinions of a child that clearly means to do us harm. The band liked it, Rose, and I know they'll stand behind me.

*(The band is, in fact, standing behind him. They now, very quickly, move away to get out of this position. Octavio sits, broken, and stares at Alice.)*

OCTAVIO: I hope this makes you happy, little girl. You've turned everyone against me, even my instrumentalists, and I don't think you were even listening to the song. You twisted and turned the entire time Rose was singing, and half the time your eyes were elsewhere.

ALICE: I tried to pay attention, but I'm so worried about my cat.

ROSE: Did you say your cat?

ALICE: Yes, my Dinah. She went under the bed quite some time ago, and hasn't come out yet. Her fur is so pretty, all white with some yellow spots, and I'm afraid she'll just ruin her coat.

ROSE: But we've seen that cat, haven't we, Octavio. *(Octavio is silent.)* Of course we have, Octavio, I commented on it while we were walking down here. Where was it that we saw it?

OCTAVIO: *(Petulantly)* I shouldn't like to say.

ROSE: Oh, don't be like that, just because the girl didn't like your song. Why, you've written simply millions of them, one more or less won't hurt you. *(Octavio folds him arms, remains quiet.)* Octavio, tell her at once, or you'll know the reason why.

OCTAVIO: Oh, very well, if it will make the girl go away. It was back a ways, in the maze. The tabby was worrying some string.

ALICE: Did you say in the maze?

OCTAVIO: Are you hard of hearing? In the maze, just outside the door, the second or third turn to the right.

ALICE: But there's a house out there, not a maze. I've lived here my entire life, and there's never been a maze outside that door.

OCTAVIO: Do you see, Rose, the girl is just contrary. If I told her today was Saturday, she'd probably insist it was Thursday.



ALICE: It is Thursday.

OCTAVIO: Do you see?

ROSE: She's probably just a little confused, Octavio. Sometimes people think one thing, and then they find out they're very much mistaken. *(To Alice.)* Your cat is outside, dear, and if you find yourself lost, just ask directions.

ALICE: *(Crossing to the door, opening it.)* Why, there is a maze outside the bedroom, just like the trimmed hedges at Dean Park! How curious, it's never been here before!

ROSE: It can be a horrible bother until your used to it. I see whole clumps of people wandering around, just looking dazed, with no idea where they are at all.

ALICE: Just like me. I thought I was in my bedroom, but I couldn't have been. This is not my house, and I don't think I would like to live here at all! I would never find my way to the right room, and I'd always be on the wrong side of the house altogether. I'm not in my bedroom now, and I thought I was, Heaven knows whose bedroom I might blunder into with a wrong turn! But I must find my cat, and if I have to have an adventure to do so, than an adventuress I will be. *(Alice steps into the maze.)*

# The Seduction of Vashti

*(Alice is in a longish hallway. The walls are wood, with portrait paintings hanging from them.)*

ALICE: I don't see Dinah at all, and was it the second or third right I was supposed to make? All these halls look so much alike; I don't remember exactly where I started. I suppose I shall have to ask someone.

*(There is a GIRL IN A WEDDING DRESS as the end of the hall, near a door. She is seated, with a glass of gin, and she is sobbing.)*

ALICE: Hullo? Hullo, are you all right?

GIRL: Is there no use?

ALICE: I'd think there would be. If you stop crying, maybe we can find it together.

GIRL: I shall poison myself.

ALICE: Don't do that! If you pull yourself together, I think you'll see that whatever is bothering you isn't so bad after all.

GIRL: I'm quite done in.

ALICE: Why are you so sad, what is it that's bothering you? Please tell me, and maybe I can find a solution.

GIRL: I have a horror of my wedding night.

ALICE: But you can't be any older than I am! Don't tell me you are going to be married, you're far too young!

GIRL: I shall flee! *(The girl rises, flees.)*

ALICE: Wait! I was hoping you could help me! *(To herself)* I hope this isn't an omen of the experiences I shall have. If everybody in the maze is as helpful as that girl, I shall never find my cat. There must be someone I can ask.

*(Alice returns along the hallway, now very confused. She pauses, looking around.)*

ALICE: Isn't this where I started from? Am I going around in circles? No, I can't be, the paintings on the walls here are different. Oh, if only every hall didn't look so much alike. Dinah! Dinah!  
*(Singsong:)* Tell me, dear pussycat  
Where have you been?

I've been to London  
And dined on the Queen.  
As smoke rose from the battlements  
And blood filled the Thames  
All the strays, we gathered round  
And devoured her remains.

*(Startled.)* That's not what I meant at all. I wanted to sing that old nursery rhyme, but it came out all scrambled. Oh, I must be nervous! Dinah! Dinah!  
*(Coming to a door.)* A door! I should open it, and see if my Dinah is inside, but I'm frightened. Nothing is as it should be here; nothing is as it seems. Still, I must have courage, or I will never see my cat again.

*(She pushes the door open. Inside is an Oriental courtyard, with three Persian handmaidens hanging wet robes to dry. There is a table in the center of the room, close to the ground, and set for a feast. VASHTI, the Queen of Persia, is seated at this table.)*

ALICE:           Excuse me.

*(The handmaidens begin to circle Alice, looking closely at her. They take up parasols and prod her.)*

HANDMAIDEN 1: Is it possible she is what she seems?

VASHTI:        She can be nothing else.

ALICE:           *(Giggling.)* Say, what are you doing?

HANDMAIDEN 2: Could this be a plot, are you sure she is not tricking us?

VASHTI:        Our hosts are not capable of the kinds of trickeries that produce little girls. Although sadly misplaced, this child is genuine.

ALICE:           Please stop, this tickles so!

HANDMAIDEN 3: She may be more than she pretends. We must be certain!

VASHTI:        We will find out. *(To Alice.)* What is your name?

ALICE:           I am Alice.

VASHTI:        You may not be where you want to be, Alice. I think you have made a poor decision about where you are going and what you are doing there.

ALICE:           That may be so, and I'm not too pleased myself, but I haven't any option.

VASHTI:        You have put yourself in the worst of all possible places at the worst of all possible times, child. Please come over and sit with us.

ALICE:           Thank you all the same, but I can't delay just now.

VASHTI: You hurry to the grave, believe me. There is much afoot.

ALICE: Did you say the grave? What could you possibly mean?

VASHTI: Sit by my side, and I will explain. (*Alice crosses to her, sits.*) Do you know me?

ALICE: If I do, I've forgotten.

VASHTI: I was Queen of Persia. I am Vashti.

ALICE: Then I should curtsy. (*Alice rises and does so.*) Your majesty. Your name is familiar; I may have read about you somewhere.

VASHTI: Do you remember?

ALICE: I remember the story made me very sad.

VASHTI: Yes, it is a sad story. I have had a great injustice done to me. I have had everything in my life stripped away from me, because of my husband. Because I would not do what he wanted.

ALICE: Did he ask you for something terrible?

VASHTI: Yes. He asked me to appear naked at a party, so he could show me off to his many mean and ugly friends. I refused, and did not know how severely he would punish me.

ALICE: Did he beat you?

VASHTI: No, a queen is not beaten. But he was afraid that other women would follow my example, and not do what their husbands demand. So he divorced me, and afraid that I might go to the arms of another, he made it so I can never have children.

ALICE: Oh, no! Did you want children very much?

VASHTI: I hadn't thought that I did, but I hate that I will never be able to make the choice. And since I can't, I find that I want to.

ALICE: Did you run away from you husband?

VASHTI: I was forced by him to leave. He couldn't bear to have me around.

HANDMAIDEN 1: It was terrible. They put us outside the castle walls, and shouted mean things at us as we went away.

HANDMAIDEN 2: They stood on the walls that surround the city, and threw sweetmeats and fruits at us, and laughed.

HANDMAIDEN 3: We opened our parasols to protect our heads, but the Queen had the idea that we should instead turn the parasols over and use them to collect up the foods they were throwing.

ALICE: I can't imagine! You must have been in tears!

VASHTI: I very nearly was, but I have too much pride to allow myself to weep at the actions of those stupid men. It was not easy, I thought my life was over then. I thought: This is how the Queen dies, in a shower of fruits and sweetmeats. But we did not die.

ALICE: What did you do?

VASHTI: We went into the desert, and lived off the food we collected. Many times things were very hard for us, because we could not find water or shelter from the sun. After a week a sandstorm nearly buried us, but we were rescued by a caravan of Bedouins.

ALICE: How good for you!

VASHTI: Not so good, Alice. The chief of the caravan was a demon prince, and he brought us to this maze. He has been very kind, giving us new clothes and allowing us to wash our filthy garments, and feeding us. But he means evil.

ALICE: A demon prince? Are we in danger?

VASHTI: Not as long as we are together. He would like to seduce me and devour me, but my company protects me. He must have me alone to work his magic.

ALICE: Then I will remain here and see that you are not left alone, and I will not risk putting myself in jeopardy by leaving this room.

VASHTI: I have told my handmaidens, and now I must warn you. The servants of the demon prince will try to steal you away from me, so I am alone and vulnerable. They will lie to you, but you mustn't believe them. It will be very difficult, because they will offer you the thing that you want most in the world.

ALICE: How will they know what that thing is?

VASHTI: Because your desires mark you. The way you hold your head, the way you fold your hands, the demons can read this like language, and they will know.

ALICE: It sounds frightening. Are they monsters?

VASHTI: Yes, Alice, they are monsters. But they look like men, and they will tell you that they are men. I know this sounds awful, but there is no reason to be afraid: You will know they are demons because there will be clues in their appearances.

ALICE: What sort of clues? Oh, please tell me!

VASHTI: Some have feathers coming out of their eyes. Some will suddenly bleed from their fingertips, and leave red marks on the plates. Some have ears that can be stretched like taffy, or they will have organs made of metal. They are not men, and there will always be something about them that is not like a man. Here is one now, and you will see!

*(A servant enters, with a plate of foods. He serves all at the table, sighing sadly.)*

ALICE: *(Sotto voice.)* Perhaps you are mistaken. He seems perfectly average.

VASHTI: *(Sotto voice.)* I am not mistaken. Look! *(She holds up a plate, and there are the stains of blood.)*

ALICE: *(Sotto voice.)* A monster! He bleeds from his fingers!

*(The servant sighs, sadly, and leaves the table. He crosses to a far end of the room and opens his case. He produces a violin from inside, and proceeds to tune it. Curious, handmaiden 1 crosses to him.)*

HANDMAIDEN 1: Have you got a musical instrument there?

SERVANT 1: A violin. It soothes me to play it.

HANDMAIDEN 1: But you can't mean that you have a love of music!

SERVANT 1: Madame, there is nothing I have a greater love for.

HANDMAIDEN 1: That can't be. It is my understanding that evil things are frightened by pretty noises, and flee them.

SERVANT 1: That is also my understanding.

HANDMAIDEN 1: There is some kind of deception being played out here. Your fingers bleed!

SERVANT 1: Ah, no. *(He plays the strains of a melody.)* There is no deceiving here; I am not what you think I am. I was a composer and a musician before I was brought here, and I am held here against my will. My music is the only thing that keeps me from taking my own life. *(He plays the melody again.)* My fingers bleed because I play my instrument so often, the strings cut my skin.

HANDMAIDEN 1: How could you know about that song?

SERVANT 1: It has always been my favorite. It is the piece I used when I auditioned to the Academe de Jean St. Victor's.

HANDMAIDEN 1: That is the exact song my mother used to sing to lull me to sleep when I was an infant. I must say, I am awash with emotions hearing it again. I can still remember all the words.

SERVANT 1: Then do an old man a kindness, and sing for me.

HANDMAIDEN 1: Do you mean it?

SERVANT 1: It would be a great honor.

HANDMAIDEN 1: Then I will. *(Singing:)*

I am oh so sorry  
That our president is dead,  
And everybody's sorry  
So my father said;  
And the horrid man who killed him  
Is a sitting in his cell  
And I'm glad that Emma Goldman  
Doesn't board at this hotel.

*(The servant sets down his instrument, and applauds.)*

SERVANT 1: This is too much! You have a voice like a bird!

HANDMAIDEN 1: You flatter me.

SERVANT 1: Not at all, not at all, you're quite magnificent, really. Say, do you know *There's a Drunk in Mama's Garden?*

HANDMAIDEN 1: I'm afraid I don't.

SERVANT 1: What a shame, I'm sure you would love it! Say, I've got an idea. If you could sneak off to my room for just a moment, I could show you the music.

HANDMAIDEN 1: Oh, I couldn't, really.

SERVANT 1: It would give me so much joy, and my life is so bad! Surely you can find it in your heart to so this one favor.

HANDMAIDEN 1: But my Queen . . .

SERVANT 1: She's guarded by three others, what could your absence for a minute or two possibly harm? Please say you will.

HANDMAIDEN 1: Very well then, but just for a moment.

*(They exit together, and a second servant comes in with a platter. He wears sunglasses.)*

ALICE: *(Sotto voice.)* This one seems harmless.

VASHTI: *(Sotto voice.)* But it is not so. *(She reaches to the man's coat, plucks off a feather.)*

ALICE: *(Sotto voice.)* Diabolical! Feathers come from his eyes!

*(The servant places a plate before Vashti, and she opens the lid. She reacts with surprise.)*

VASHTI: But you've only brought us four plates, and there are five of us.

SERVANT 2: I only find four, your Highness.

ALICE: One of your handmaidens is gone!

VASHTI: Gone? But how can that be?

HANDMAIDEN 2: She may have slipped away with the last servant.

HANDMAIDEN 3: The good-looking man with the long beard and the violin.

VASHTI: That fool! She must have believed the old wives' tale about demons shying away from pleasant sounds.

ALICE: That is not true?

VASHTI: On the contrary, they pride themselves on their fine taste in music. She is surely devoured by now! *(Vashti strikes the 2nd servant)* Villain! She was just a girl, have you no sympathy?

SERVANT 2: *(Reacting, pained.)* I can assure the queen that I have no knowledge of these things.

*(He moves away and then sits down, clutching his stomach. A handmaiden crosses to him.)*

HANDMAIDEN 2: Are you hurt?

SERVANT 2: It will pass.

HANDMAIDEN 2: Why is your voice so familiar to me?

SERVANT 2: It is because you know me, Zelda. Look closely at my face.

HANDMAIDEN 2: How did you know my name? And there is something about your face that is familiar to me. *(Startled.)* Angelo?

SERVANT 2: The same, my dear, and isn't it a small world?

HANDMAIDEN 2: This is not possible, am I losing my mind? You developed consumption six years ago, and died from it!

SERVANT 2: That is what everybody believes, because the truth was too ghastly to report. I shudder to think about it, even now.

HANDMAIDEN 2: There can be no other truth. I was at the funeral, I saw you put into the ground!



SERVANT 2: I was buried alive, Zelda. I managed to crawl out, but my time in the grave affected me. I cannot stand the light anymore.

HANDMAIDEN 2: That is why you are wearing the sunglasses!

SERVANT 2: The slightest sunlight affects them, and pains me, and I cannot stop from weeping. I have surrounded them by a small layer of down to collect the tears.

HANDMAIDEN 2: That explains the feathers! I can't tell you the joy this brings me!

SERVANT 2: Does it?

HANDMAIDEN 2: Oh, Angelo, how can you say that? You know how I felt about you!

SERVANT 2: I feared there was another. That is why I could not return to town, and fled. I could not bear to see you in the arms of another.

HANDMAIDEN 2: There was never another, Angelo, there was only you! How I wish you had returned, I have never stopped mourning!

SERVANT 2: And I for you! I would often remember the gay times we had together, at your mother's house! How is she?

HANDMAIDEN 2: Sick with rheumatism, I am afraid.

SERVANT 2: And the pastor, Sir Donovan?

HANDMAIDEN 2: Stripped of his position. He's sharing a room with a young opera tenor in Whistletown now.

SERVANT 2: I always suspected it. Say, could you break away for a moment? We have so much catching up to do!

HANDMAIDEN 2: I'd like to, but I can't leave the queen. Besides, we can sit right here and discuss the family.

SERVANT 2: *(He leans forward and kisses her.)* That is not what I meant when I said we need to catch up. And the Queen is still protected by two.

HANDMAIDEN 2: *(Stunned.)* Oh. I cannot refuse, but we mustn't take too long.

SERVANT 2: Let us be off!

*(They exit together, and a third servant enters with a serving tray.)*

ALICE: *(Sotto voice.)* You can't mean this gentleman also! He's so handsome!

VASHTI: *(Sotto voice.)* But I do. Watch his ears. *(She reaches up and tugs on one of his ears. It stretches away from his body.)*

ALICE: *(Sotto voice.)* Too much! Like taffy!

*(The servant places a plate before Vashti, and she opens the lid. She reacts with surprise.)*

VASHTI: But you've only brought enough for three people, and there are four of us!

SERVANT 3: Look again, you'll see you're mistaken.

VASHTI: No no! Where has Zelda gone?

HANDMAIDEN 3: She may have gone after that last servant. She seemed to think she knew him.

VASHTI: Stupid girl, then it is too late for her already! Didn't she know that demons can seize the appearance and the mannerisms of the dead?

ALICE: Is that true?

VASHTI: Yes, and if this keeps up I will be lost! Beast! *(She strikes the servant. He does not react in any way, but continues to serve.)* Beast! Beast! You shall not continue to harm my girls, I insist you leave at once!

SERVANT 3: As the Madame wishes.

*(He turns to go, but the third handmaiden rushes after him.)*

HANDMAIDEN 3: Wait for a moment!

SERVANT 3: Yes?

HANDMAIDEN 3: Take me with you! I hate the queen!

SERVANT 3: But you know I am a demon, I cannot disguise my ears. *(He pulls them, like taffy.)* Aren't you frightened that I may devour you?

HANDMAIDEN 3: If you can see what I want most, you will see the answer to that.

SERVANT 3: *(He takes her face in his hand, stares deep into her eyes.)* Yes, I can see. You have served Vashti since you were a little girl, and she has been mean to you.

HANDMAIDEN 3: Yes.

SERVANT 3: You wish to be taken away from this, you wish to be with your friends, even if they have been devoured.

HANDMAIDEN 3: Yes, even if they have been devoured.

SERVANT 3: But you do not believe this has been their fate. The queen has lied to you in the past.

HANDMAIDEN 3: She is a very proud woman, and very distant. She only tells the truth when it suits her. She would have appeared before her husband and his friends, but she was vain. She had a skin condition, and that prevented her, but nothing else!

SERVANT 3: What do you think happened to the other girls, to your friends?

HANDMAIDEN 3: I think they received their fondest wishes.

SERVANT 3: And what is your fondest wish?

HANDMAIDEN 3: To not be a handmaiden.

SERVANT 3: Then come with me. *(They exit. Another servant enters with a goblet and two glasses; this is a young man dressed in white.)*

BOY IN WHITE: A drink for the Queen?

VASHTI: Thank you, but why are there only two glasses? *(She looks around, then.)* The third servant! Damn that girl, I knew she would betray me, she's hated me since I punished her when she was very young. I am lost! *(She takes a deep drink of the wine.)* Alice, I am lost!

ALICE: I am still by your side! You remain safe!

VASHTI: I will be seduced and devoured this evening, I know it! I cannot bear this!

*(Vashti swoons, falls to the ground. The boy in white hurries to her side, kneels next to her.)*

BOY IN WHITE: She has had a fit! She has had a fit!

ALICE: Oh no! What can we do!

BOY IN WHITE: Pour a little water into a napkin! *(Alice does so.)* Now bring it here and wipe the queen's face with it!

*(Alice does so, and Vashti stirs. She seizes Alice's hand.)*

VASHTI: What has happened to me? My stomach does not feel well.

ALICE: You were overcome with fear, and you collapsed.

VASHTI: *(Weakly.)* Did I? I feel so weak, and my head is spinning. You will not leave my side, will you, Alice?

ALICE: No, never.

VASHTI: You mustn't leave me alone, I cannot defend myself. If I fall asleep, you must be here for me.

ALICE: I will never leave your side, Queen Vashti.

VASHTI: Do not think I have weak nerves, Alice. I have been poisoned. *(She closes her eyes.)*

ALICE: Poisoned!

BOY IN WHITE: There must have been something in the wine! I have poisoned the Queen! *(Anguished.)* I should be hanged!

ALICE: You should indeed, you wicked, wicked boy. You've brought nothing but evil into this room.

BOY IN WHITE: But I never wanted this! I was deceived!

ALICE: Some deceiving is going on tonight, that much I'm sure of. You wanted the Queen poisoned, so your master could have his way with her!

BOY IN WHITE: Never! My parents never raised me to assist in the murder of Royalty, I am as much a victim as anyone!

ALICE: You can't fool me. Demons do not have parents.

BOY IN WHITE: Demons don't, but little boys who have been kidnapped in the night do! I was stolen out of my bedroom in Swainswick and forced to serve the Prince.

ALICE: Swainswick! I've been to Swainswick and visited the church there. Do you mean, you're here against your will?

BOY IN WHITE: I fell asleep on the night of my sixteenth birthday, and when I woke up the closet of my bedroom opened into a maze. Skeletons came out of the walls, and seized me, and brought me to the Prince. I do not want any of this; I just want to go home.

ALICE: Can that be true? That is so much like what happened to me.

*(Alice walks slowly around the boy.)*

ALICE: You do not look like the others, they were dressed in black. There are no feathers in your eyes, and you have not left stains of blood on the dishes. *(She seizes his ears, and he shouts in pain.)* This is as it should be.

BOY IN WHITE: Are you convinced?

ALICE: Is this possible? You do not mean the queen any harm?

BOY IN WHITE: On the contrary, I will help you defend her, even if it means my own life!

ALICE: You cannot know how happy I am to hear that! It is so good to meet someone like you; I was feeling quite alone.

BOY IN WHITE: You are not alone, this maze is filled with all sorts of folks who don't mean to be here, would rather they weren't, but don't know how to get out. Why, do you know what I saw in the hallway?

ALICE: Tell me, please.

BOY IN WHITE: A little animal, a little lost beast. The poor thing was frightened just to death; it was shivering and crying.

ALICE: That is so sad! What sort of an animal was it?

BOY IN WHITE: A pussycat, all white with little yellow markings. I went to give it some bread, but it fled from me. Why are you looking at me like that?

ALICE: You must tell me where you saw this cat.

BOY IN WHITE: Just outside, in the hallway. You look as though you were about to cry.

ALICE: I feel my heart is breaking. You have found my best friend, my dear Dinah. I must go to her at once!

BOY IN WHITE: That is impossible, to do so would mean death for the queen. I will go and fetch the animal.

ALICE: This is too much for me to stand! Dinah will not let herself be fetched by you, she will run away. I fear I will lose her forever!

BOY IN WHITE: Then you must go, and I will remain and guard the queen.

ALICE: No, that cannot be! I would wind up lost myself; you must lead me to her! Is there nothing we can do?

BOY IN WHITE: There may be a way. We can hang these sheets around the Queen, so she is hidden from view. Then we will have bought ourselves the seconds we need to retrieve the pussycat, while the demon is searching.

ALICE: Will it work?

BOY IN WHITE: It must! Give me a hand! *(They pull the hanging sheets around the Queen.)*  
There, it is done. Now let us hurry!

*(They exit into the hallway.)*

ALICE: I'm so grateful, without you I'd be lost. I'm sorry I said you should be hanged, you really deserve a medal or a reward instead.

BOY IN WHITE: Then I'll take my reward now, before we go any further.

*(He seizes Alice, kisses her. She pulls away, startled.)*

ALICE: That wasn't right. I guess you had that coming, but I don't like to have boys sneak kisses off of me. I might have given you one if you had just asked.

BOY IN WHITE: If that's the case, could I have another?

ALICE: Yes. But just one, and hurry. *(The boy kisses Alice again. She makes a face.)* That's curious. There is a terrible taste in my mouth, like copper.

BOY IN WHITE: *(Nervously.)* I noticed nothing.

ALICE: I must know. *(She kisses him again, her eyes widen.)* You! The taste is from the inside of your mouth!

BOY IN WHITE: What of it? I've done nothing wrong.

ALICE: I've been a fool, and you've played a horrible trick on me, but I know you now. I will have nothing to do with this, demon, and I will return to the queen.

BOY IN WHITE: Ah, girl, the damage is done. *(He smiles, and then sticks his tongue out at her. It is black, and metal.)* Look, the demon prince approaches!

*(The boy gestures to the sheets. A black shadow is falling across them, moving toward the figure inside. The shadow is long, and horribly distorted.)*

ALICE: I can't be too late! *(She rushes to the sheets, draws them away.)* What goes on in here?

*(The sheets fall away to reveal: A little boy, and Vashti kneeling beside him cradling his head in her hands.)*

VASHTI: Alice. You must come and meet my new friend. He came in here with a puzzle book, and needs my help in solving some of the riddles.

ALICE: You have not seen what I have seen!

VASHTI: What is the matter? Why do you look at me like that?

ALICE: You have not seen the shadows? You do not know the danger?

VASHTI: Danger? There is no danger here.

ALICE: Look upon the sheets! *(She pulls a sheet close, so the boy's twisted shadow falls upon it.)* Behold the demon prince! You must flee!

VASHTI: I will do nothing of the sort, Alice, and you must hold your tongue! You are being very rude to our host.

ALICE: Our host? Then, you know?

VASHTI: I am not a fool, girl. I was mortally afraid when I found you had left me alone, but now I see the prince means me no harm. He has explained that he longs for companionship.

ALICE: He says that because he knows it will affect you! He is saying that because he knows you want a child! Don't be fooled as I was, because they know your desires!

VASHTI: You're beginning to annoy me, Alice. Look at this child, I hardly have anything to fear from him. He is too small to harm me, and too young to seduce me. He is alone in the world, except for his servants, and he wants a friend to help him with his games.

ALICE: Then I will not leave your side, and I will make sure you are correct.

VASHTI: You will do nothing of the sort. Look, the child is frightened, because you burst in here and started screaming. I insist you leave, and at once!

ALICE: Can it be you are not seeing the mistake you are making?

VASHTI: The only mistake I have made is in not realizing that you are a pushy and unpleasant little girl. *(Vashti reaches for a parasol, throws it at Alice.)* Scat! Leave at once!

ALICE: Ouch! Please listen to me, you are hastening to your own funeral!

VASHTI: *(Picking up another parasol.)* You have gone too far! It's time someone raised their fists to you, and taught you some manners. *(Vashti strikes Alice with the parasol.)* Take that, and know when you're not wanted!

*(The force of her blows pushes Alice back, and the Queen pulls the sheets back so she is again hidden. The child's shadow is again long and twisted, and it approaches Vashti. Alice tries to rise from the floor.)*

ALICE: Please listen to me! You are in terrible danger!

*(The shadow descends upon the Queen, and there is a struggle. Then: Silence. Suddenly things begin to drop from the sky, onto Alice's head. She picks one up, and begins to weep bitterly.)*

ALICE: Fruits and sweetmeats, its raining fruits and sweetmeats! This can only mean that the Queen is no more! Oh, this wretched, wretched place! When will it all end?

*(She rises, pressing her hands to her eyes, and exits.)*

# Ghosts

*(Alice comes back up the hallway, her clothes damp.)*

ALICE: I'm sure I don't like this part of the maze at all, half of it is flooded, and I have to step around great pools of water. A pity, really, because it looks like it was once so nice. I saw some bits of furniture floating about, and they all seemed to be the most expensive sort, and there are tapestries on the walls. I wonder what could have happened here, to do so much destruction? One thing is certain, I won't find Dinah anywhere near; she just hated taking baths. I hope I can find someone to direct me to somewhere dryer. *(Alice pushes the door open.)* What have we here?

*(In the room is a large table. Three women are seated at the table, speaking to each other, but they make no noises. From a balcony three violinists play silently, while a couple dances below. A butler in a top hat at the far end of the room notices Alice.)*

BUTLER: Terrifying, isn't it? This is a sight I never imagined I'd see, and would be happier if I didn't.

ALICE: It's unusual, I don't know what to make of it. For a moment, I thought I couldn't hear anymore. Why aren't they making any noises?

BUTLER: They will. When the clock strikes eleven they will begin, and continue to do so until a quarter past.

ALICE: I don't understand, what's so special about those fifteen minutes?

BUTLER: That is the hour of their deaths. Every day they re-enact it, just to torment me, because I alone survived.

ALICE: You can't mean to tell me these are ghosts, that every one in this room is deceased!

BUTLER: Every one except me, in the flood that swept through here just five days ago. The family of Maritza was one of the most respected in the world, a collection of artists and poets, and it is all in ruin. All that remains is I, Marc, their humble manservant, to tend to their eternal needs.

ALICE: *(Frightened.)* If that's the case, I won't stay. You'll excuse me for saying, but this is an adventure I don't think I'd fancy.

BUTLER: *(Hurrying to her, taking her arm)* I won't hear of it! You must stay; I can't stand to be alone here anymore. If you leave, I will lose my mind.

ALICE: *(Pulling away.)* I won't be bullied; I'm not at all comfortable here. If you hate it



so much, you should leave it alone, but don't think you can force me to remain.

**BUTLER:** (*Producing a knife.*) Stay or I'll cut your throat. I'm going mad with grief, and I must have someone to share it with. Tell me you won't go.

**ALICE:** I couldn't even dream the thing.

**BUTLER:** I'm so pleased! Let me bring you around, and introduce you to the family. You should know before whom you stand, you really must meet the hosts.

**ALICE:** I wouldn't mind if I didn't.

**BUTLER:** (*Seizing her by the hand, taking her to the table.*) These are the three sisters. Beautiful, aren't they? Don't you think they are extraordinary?

**ALICE:** Very much so, if you care to hear me say it.

**BUTLER:** Men came from all over to seek permission to marry the sisters, at all times of the day. It wasn't unusual for me to be woken well after midnight by a young suitor, and I would have to turn him away. (*Taking her to the balcony.*) And these are the brothers.

**ALICE:** How do you do?

**BUTLER:** What talent there was in those hands! One a sculptor, one a painter, one a novelist and all played music and acted besides! They were cheery lads, always had a joke to tell or a kind word when someone seemed a little down.

**ALICE:** They seem like they were quite swell.

**BUTLER:** Oh, yes, there were never any sweller! (*Leading Alice to the dancing couple.*) And these are my employers, Mr. and Mrs. Maritza. How they loved music, how they loved fine things, and aren't they splendid dancers?

**ALICE:** I haven't seen better, and I'm pleased to have been able to make their acquaintance so shortly after they expired. Do you know the time? If it's near nine, I have to be pressing on, because my Uncle will be arriving.

**BUTLER:** (*Looking at watch.*) You've missed him already; it's nearing eleven now.

**ALICE:** Nearing eleven! But this is terrible, then the party might already be over, and I've missed Thomas and his wonderful surprises. And if it's almost eleven, isn't that when you said . . .

**BUTLER:** Yes, the spectacle begins, and the Maritza's will act out their own deaths. The time is on us now!

*(The sounds of the violin playing becomes audible, the talking of the sisters can now be heard.)*

ALICE: This is too much, you must let me go! I can't watch this; I am too frightened!

BUTLER: Don't leave this room, or I will take my knife to you. I've been alone with this evil for five days now, now that you're here you can comfort me.

MRS. MARITZA: Marc? Marc? Where is that butler now?

BUTLER: Coming, mum! *(He releases Alice, crosses to the woman.)*

MRS. MARITZA: Where have you been hiding yourself, man, I've been wanting you for simply hours now! If you don't shape up, I'll return you to the service and find someone else. There is a young girl I've been hearing just wonderful things about, and I think she'd fill your spot quite well.

BUTLER: Sorry, mum. What was it that you were needing?

MRS. MARITZA: Oh, bother. I've been wanting it for so long, I've forgotten what it was. What was I needing, Mr. Maritza?

MR. MARITZA: You were going to ask Marc if the mail had come yet, and if the newspaper had arrived.

MRS. MARITZA: That's it exactly. I was expecting some letters from my friend Lady Itelberge, and I wondered if there was any news stories that I might find interesting.

BUTLER: I will go and check at once, mum. *(He crosses toward the exit)*

MRS. MARITZA: That man is simply dreadful, he's so common. I think he sneaks around, Mr. Maritza, and hides things from us.

MR. MARITZA: I hope you're mistaken, Mrs. Maritza.

MRS. MARITZA: It's what I feel in my heart. I'm sure he mocks us behind our backs.

BROTHER 1: *(The brothers stop playing music.)* Marc!

BUTLER: *(Pausing.)* Sir!

BROTHER 1: The lads wanted me to have a word with you. Come up here for a second, would you?

BUTLER: Right away. *(The man hurries up to the balcony. Brother 1 hits him in the stomach.)*

BROTHER 1: Do you think we hadn't noticed you lingering around our sisters rooms at night? We know you peep through the keyholes, and watch them when they sleep.

BUTLER: *(Gasping.)* It won't happen again, sir!

BROTHER 1: See that it doesn't, or I will be more severe.

MRS. MARITZA: Marc! Marc! The letters, the paper!

BUTLER: *(Hurrying down the stairs.)* At once, mum.

SISTER 1: Marc! Come over here to us without delay!

BUTLER: Yes, Madame. *(He crosses to the table.)*

SISTER 1: I was just arguing with my sisters, and we need you to help us solve a disagreement. I think that you love me more than you love the others, but both my sisters feel your love is stronger for them than it is for me. Who is correct?

BUTLER: I feel equally for all three of you, Madame.

SISTER 1: But that's not fair, and I won't let that be the end of it. I'll win your heart yet, Marc, because women are very jealous creatures.

MRS. MARITZA: Marc! Marc! What are you doing?

BROTHER 1: Marc, remember what I told you.

BUTLER: At once, at once. *(He hurries to the exit, where Alice has her hand on the door.)* Where are you going, little girl? What did I tell you?

ALICE: I can't stand this! My heart feels like it's going to explode, and I can't bear the way that they treat you! We should leave together; we must get out of this awful place.

BUTLER: Bite your tongue, the Maritza's were the best sort of people. It's my job to tend to their needs, be they alive or be they dead, and I won't shrink from my duty. I'm going out for a moment to get the paper and the mail, and I expect you to be here when I return. You're a beautiful little girl; I'd feel badly if I had to put marks on your face. *(He exits. At once, all the ghosts burst out laughing.)*

SISTER 2: How long can he stand it? The last butler we had only made it four days, and then was driven away. This one has lasted almost three months, and shows no sign of letting up!

BROTHER 2: He's so stoic, and we're working him to death. He hasn't complained once, even after the tortures we've put him through.

MRS. MARITZA: Do you know he fancied himself an artist once? It's true, but he wasn't very successful, and had to go into his current line of work to pay off debts. Tell them, Mr. Maritza.

MR. MARITZA: A sad story. He had a little shop where he sold his paintings, and he published some small poems, but he was never able to keep out of the red. A shame, really, he had some small talent.

MRS. MARITZA: A greater shame if he had been successful, because then he wouldn't be our butler. He's the best we've ever had; he falls for all of our practical jokes, and does whatever we tell him.

BROTHER 3: He told me once that he specifically asked to work with us, because he admired us so greatly. Can you imagine?

SISTER 3: He's so in love with us girls, like a little puppy dog. Sometimes I feel bad, in some ways he's so sweet. But then I remember: he chooses to remain, and so must suffer whatever indignity we cause him.

ALICE: How can you be so cruel? Why do you want to cause him such harm? (*They do not respond.*) You can't hear me, can you, you ghosts? But I can hear you, I know your plotting, and I won't see you hurt that man anymore. (*The butler enters.*) I must speak to you, about a pressing matter.

BUTLER: It shall have to wait, I can't delay in my task. There is news in this paper of an impending flood, and the family must be warned. (*Calling out.*) The mail is here, and the paper, mum!

MRS. MARITZA: Oh, good. Bring it here.

SISTER 1: (*As the butler begins to cross.*) Oh, man, stop and speak with us for a moment.

BUTLER: I will return just as soon as I deliver these things to your mother.

SISTER 2: You'll do nothing of the sort. We want a word with you now, just for a moment. Pretty young girls shouldn't be made to wait.

BUTLER: Of course. What can I do for you?

SISTER 3: Is it true that you wrote poetry? We've been hearing all sorts of wild stories, and we've been delirious with excitement wanting to know the truth.

BUTLER: I don't like to talk about it, but it's true. I once dabbled in poetry, and songwriting, and some other creative things. I'm ashamed to say nothing much came of it.

SISTER 1: Don't be ashamed, Marc, we're very impressed. It's a most uncommon man who tries his hand at making art.

SISTER 2: We always thought you very coarse and brutal, we never imagined there was a sensitive side to your character. You must sing us one of your songs.

BUTLER: Couldn't it wait? I'm out of practice, and there is news I must report to your mother.

SISTER 3: It can not wait. You treat us like we were common girls, who you can do whatever you like with. We will not be treated that way, and we demand you sing to us right now.

**BUTLER:** Very well, but I will have to leave you when I finish the song. (*Singing: THE GIRL IS SEDUCED WHILE THE PHOTOPLAY CONTINUES.*)  
Her mother warned her of the boys  
That might choose to take advantage  
Of a youthful girl's still uncertain  
And delicate affections.  
With sixteen cents and a carriage ride  
And a visit to the bandstand  
They might send her natural resources  
Fleeing in all directions.

But he took her, instead, to a fight down on Capitollo,  
And he hid his eyes beneath a dark blue pair of cheaters  
And he told her "It's you. It's you, and you forever."  
And then he touched her face and kissed her  
In the front row of the theater.

Her mother warned her of the boys  
That might choose to take advantage  
Of a youthful girl's still uncertain  
And delicate affections  
But this boy was handsome and  
He brought her many presents  
And when he took her to the seaside  
She didn't voice any objections.  
(*He stops singing.*) Now I must go, and without delay. (*He turns on his heels, but Alice is in his way.*)

**ALICE:** I won't let you pass, you must talk to me. These people don't care for your services as a butler at all; they just want someone here they can be cruel to.

**BUTLER:** Whatever their reasons, it is an honor to be working for this family. Do you know that they have produced masterpiece after masterpiece for seven generations, they are the finest artists that have ever been? I can't discuss it anymore; I must save them from destruction.

**ALICE:** But they are already destroyed, they drowned five days ago. You are just helping them act out their final moments; you can't save them.

**BUTLER:** There is a flood coming! I couldn't warn them before, I was too late, and they perished! I am being given a second chance, a new chance every night at eleven. I will not spoil it!

(*The first brother comes up behind the butler, grabs him by the arms, dragging him painfully to the balcony.*)

**BROTHER 1:** Come with me, Marc. The brothers want a word with you. We listened when you were singing that song to our sisters.

**BUTLER:** Can't this wait? I have to complete my chore for your mother. You all are in terrible danger!

**BROTHER 2:** I think you should worry about your own well-being, butler. What was the title of that composition you serenaded the sisters with?

**BUTLER:** "The Girl is Seduced While the Photoplay Continues."

**BROTHER 3:** I was surprised, it was quite good, really. Rather touching. I didn't know you were so talented. But do you think a melody about young girls giving themselves up to worrisome boys is the kind of a song you should be singing your employer's daughters? *(They begin to beat him.)*

**BUTLER:** *(In pain.)* Hurt me, yes, I deserve it! But not now, there is something I must tell you all! It's urgent!

**BROTHER 1:** We won't hear anymore lip out of you.

**BROTHER 2:** Take what you've got coming to you, and stop complaining.

**BROTHER 3:** It's time you learned that servants should be seen only when they're wanted, and then not heard at all.

**MRS. MARITZA:** Marc? Where are you Marc? Where are the things you said you would get me?

**BUTLER:** *(The boys release him.)* I'm on my way; I'll just be a moment! *(He staggers down the stairs, but Alice is in his way.)*

**ALICE:** I'm leaving right now, and I'm taking you with me. I was very angry that you waved that knife at me, but now I see these people drove you to it. If I were treated this way, I wouldn't be acting in a very rational manner, either.

**BUTLER:** You may be right, I may be putting up with too much. Nobody else wanted the job except me, I thought they were so talented, I wanted so much to be with them. Perhaps I will go with you, but I must warn them first. The flood is almost upon us, and as wicked as they may be, they do not deserve to drown in it. *(He pushes past her, to Mrs. Maritza.)*

**MRS. MARITZA:** Oh, there you are, at last. But where is my brandy?

**BUTLER:** Your brandy?

**MRS. MARITZA:** Yes, I asked you to bring me some brandy. I've been dancing for so long, I need a tonic, and you said you would get me one.

**BUTLER:** I went to fetch the paper, and your letters. That is what you asked me to do.

MRS. MARITZA: I asked nothing of the sort. Can't you do anything right, all you needed to do was fill up a glass and bring it to me. You've dawdled with this one little task, and haven't done it right.

BUTLER: You are mistaken. If you had asked me for brandy, I would have brought you some. It is not what you asked for, I've completed the task you assigned me, and if I dawdled it is because your children demanded my time.

MR. MARITZA: (*Slapping him.*) Don't contradict my wife. If she asked for brandy, and you brought something else, you should apologize and get her what she asked for.

BUTLER: I'm sorry, you're right. I'll have the brandy in a minute.

MRS. MARITZA: Wait. Was there any mail for me?

BUTLER: This item. (*He hands her the letter.*)

MRS. MARITZA: It's from my dear friend Lady Itelberge! (*Opening it.*) She says everything is well at Tucheby Manor, they've just installed a new crystal chandelier.

MR. MARITZA: How nice! But was there no news?

BUTLER: (*Crushing the newspaper.*) Nothing.

MR. MARITZA: Nothing? There must be something. Are you sure?

BUTLER: Very sure. There was no paper today; there is no news. I will get the drink for mum now. (*He leaves, and everybody laughs again.*)

SISTER 1: Oh, mother! That was the best one yet!

BROTHER 1: Did you see the look on his face when you told him he had fetched the wrong thing?

SISTER 2: I thought I was going to just die when daddy slapped his face!

BROTHER 2: The poor man, putting up with so much! But then again, what can he do?

MRS. MARITZA: Do you hear noises? It sounds like there are noises outside?

MR. MARITZA: Great swelling noises, like the roar of the ocean. I wonder what it could be?

SISTER 3: (*Running to the window.*) Why, it's the biggest wave I've ever seen, and it's coming right for us!

BROTHER 3: (*Running to window.*) It will flood us out, and we will all drown! Oh, help! It is upon us!

(*The family begins to scream and dash about in a panic. They mime their deaths, while Alice watches in horror.*)



ALICE: I guess that takes care of that, and I wouldn't say they didn't have it coming. But look: the corpses rise again!

*(The ghosts stand up, and take the positions they were in when Alice first entered: Talking, playing violin, dancing noiselessly. The butler enters, then tears his hair.)*

BUTLER: Bosh! Devil take it all, I've let them all drown again! Every time I am just about to save them, I lose my temper, and storm out. Will this never end?

ALICE: You can't blame yourself, they goaded you into it. No jury in the world would convict you.

BUTLER: They did treat me horribly, but that isn't an excuse. *(Grieving.)* I am a murderer! They were all artists, and geniuses, and I led them to their deaths!

ALICE: They didn't seem like artists to me, they seemed like monsters. And you're as good as any of them, I thought that song you sang was quite beautiful.

BUTLER: I cannot forgive myself, and I cannot continue. There is only one thing for me to do.

ALICE: And it's more than past time you did it. Let's leave this evil place, and not look back. What goes on here isn't right. But where are you going?

BUTLER: *(He has produced the knife, is walking away.)* I am their servant; I belong with them.

*(He steps out of the room, and a then shouts in pain. Seconds later, he comes back in.)*

ALICE: Thank goodness you came back, I thought you were going to do something foolish. You must not let these people affect you like that. *(He does not respond.)* Did you hear what I said? Why don't you answer me?

*(The butler crosses to the sisters, who turn and begin to speak noiselessly to him. He nods then picks up a serving platter and brings it to the brothers. They take glasses of wine off the platter, and drink.)*

ALICE: What have you done? I won't believe you've taken the knife to yourself, I won't believe it! What have you done? Why don't you answer me? *(He does not answer.)* I cannot stand it! *(Alice turns, flees out the door.)*



# The Sinister Twins

*(Alice comes up the hallway, very upset.)*

ALICE: This is not the place for me, not the place for me at all. I hope Dinah isn't having the sort of adventures I'm having, I hope she is well. I just want to find my way out now, and forget this ever happened. *(Stopping.)* Another door, should I open it and go in? I haven't had a very good time behind strange doors, but the only other thing I can do is go back, and my nerves couldn't take that. I'll take a deep breath, and do what I have to.

*(Alice enters from the hallway. This room is like the entry hall of a great Southern mansion. Four SOUTHERN GENTLEMEN stand in line, singing call and response gospel.)*

GENTLEMEN: *(Singing: MEAN OLD MAN.)*

I saw you standing  
In the churchyard  
Collecting pennies  
In a tin can  
I saw your gold teeth  
When you smiled  
As you held your hand out  
You're a mean old man

I saw you standing  
In the town hall  
Passing out pamphlets  
And leading the band  
I heard your voice then  
Singing an anthem  
About our brave soldiers  
You're a mean old man

I saw you standing  
By the shipyard  
Launching a steamboat  
And calling it grand  
I saw your top hat  
And your tuxedo  
As you waved to the children  
You're a mean old man

ALICE: *(Applauding.)* How swell, what a fine tune! *(The gentlemen smile and bow.)* I've never heard anything like that, it was quite keen, and it's been so long since I've had a chance to hear something that calmed me.

TWIN 1: *(From the right door.)* Why, WHO is that I hear in our entry hall?

TWIN 2: *(From the left door.)* Who could it BE, dear sister? Maybe it is the NEW girl.

*(The SINISTER TWINS enter from opposite ends of the room, their tiny waists all but missing in a corset, their hair bungled up. Both sisters are anatomically unusual, with two arms sticking out on the left side of their bodies, and no arms on the right. They see Alice, and rush to cross to her.)*

TWIN 1: Oh, HELLO, girl! I DO hope you've come to replace our maid, you look as though you would fill out the uniform nicely.

TWIN 2: It's TERRIBLY important. We're entertaining gentleman callers this afternoon, and everything MUST be perfect. Our usual help is SO unreliable.

TWIN 1: We're sorry to call on you with such short notice, and we know you're to be wed this afternoon, but the agency PROMISED they could spare you for a few hours.

TWIN 2: Just to serve drinks, you know. These are Southern gentlemen, and poets, and they become quite DRY.

ALICE: I'm sure you've mistaken me for someone else. It's not unusual for people to think I'm someone I'm not.

TWIN 1: I don't think you're anyone AT ALL. But I was told a girl would be coming by, and delivering a package, and we were told she would ASSIST us with our party.

TWIN 2: Assist us you shall! But, you're not even DRESSED properly!

TWIN 1: *(Pushing Alice into a chair, then unlacing her shoes.)* These shoes won't do at ALL.

ALICE: Won't do?

TWIN 1: Not at ALL. I've some black ones, with higher heels, for you.

*(Twin 1 crosses to a closet, takes out a maid's uniform and shoes. The other twin greets guests, while the first laces the high heels onto Alice's feet.)*

TWIN 2: *(To gentlemen.)* And how are YOU? And HOW are you?

*(Twin 2 returns to Alice, while her sister goes to the gentlemen.)*

TWIN 2: Why, you've no support for your stockings! You MUST put this garter on at once!

ALICE: Must I? I've heard they damage your circulation . . . *(Alice gasps as Twin 2 pulls the garter onto her leg.)* Please, let me do this.

TWIN 1: *(To gentlemen.)* It's so GOOD to see you. It's SO good to see you!

*(The twins trade off again, twin 1 returning to Alice, twin 2 returning to the guests.)*

TWIN 1: Please put on this topcoat and bonnet. You won't look AT ALL like a servant without them. *(She places the topcoat on Alice's shoulders.)*

ALICE: *(Standing, angry.)* It's hardly necessary to tug on me like that. I've been dressing myself for some time now.

TWIN 2: *(To gentlemen.)* And wasn't that a LOVELY serenade? And WASN'T that a lovely serenade? *(Returning to Alice, handing her a serving tray.)* You look so SMART now, doesn't she look SMART? Take these drinks to our gentlemen, girl, I'm sure their throats are QUITE parched by now.

*(The sisters cross to the center of the room. The four gentlemen approach them, each from a different corner of the room. In order to make eye contact with the gentlemen, the sisters stand side by side, each facing an opposite direction, with their arms on the outside. The sisters rotate clockwise, nodding and smiling, while the gentlemen callers become aware of Alice with the drinks, upstage, and rotate counter clockwise to get glasses of whisky.)*

TWIN 1: It's really an HONOUR to be able to hold this poetry reading today, we really are so PLEASED.

TWIN 2: We're sure it's going to be a FABULOUS success, and we're just MAD about your poetry.

GENTLEMAN 1: The honor is all ours, dear ladies. To think that our scribbling has touched your hearts gives us great pleasure.

GENTLEMAN 2: It's not often we're treated to the company of such beautiful and charming hostesses. Not often enough, I dare say, not often enough.

*(Three intruders enter now: The RHINOSAURUS, tapping a cane, and the VAMP pushing a baby buggy. An ARMADILLO is in the buggy, straining to hear. They take places at the back of the room, and the rhino signals for a drink.)*

TWIN 2: You flatter us, you really do. And we do SO look forward to hearing you recite some of your famous work.

TWIN 1: It will just MAKE the day for us, we've always been so FOND of good literature.

GENTLEMAN 3: Now it is *you* who flatter us, dear creatures. We put to pen to paper, and having written, sip brandy. A silly exercise really, and not literature.

GENTLEMAN 4: If you insist, we've brought a few pages, an afterthought really. But if you're going to force us, we'll swallow our pride and read the damned things.

*(All four gentlemen COUGH simultaneously, clearing their throats. Alice crosses to the intruders, gives them drinks.)*

ALICE: I'm sorry. I hadn't noticed you come in.

RHINO: Don't mind us too much, just keep the drinks coming.

VAMP: *(Alice is handing the Armadillo a drink.)* Don't let your fingers brush against him, maid. He has the dreaded leprosy.

ALICE: *(Pulling back.)* Oh, my. How bad for him.

RHINO: He was a great deal more amusing before his ears came off, and we didn't mind his sickness so much. But now we have to shout all the time, or he feels left out.

ARMADILLO: What? Don't whisper; you're conspiring against me!

ALICE: Do you belong here? Are you with the poets?

*(The Rhino SHUSHES Alice, points her direction to the twins. They continue turning small circles in the center of the room, talking to the gentlemen.)*

TWIN 1: We'd so FANCY a little bit of culture to bring life to what are otherwise MOR-BIDLY dull afternoons.

TWIN 2: We so hoped you would bring some culture to what is otherwise UNINTER-RUPTED monotony.

GENTLEMEN: *(In unison.)* If you really insist.

TWINS: *(In unison.)* Oh, we do! We do!

*(The twins move to another part of the room, taking seats, not seeing the intruders. The gentlemen callers line up, leafing through their suits for the papers that contain their poems.)*

RHINO: No, we're not with the poets. We just came to observe.

VAMP: We're not even on the guest list, strictly speaking. We're just looking for a little diversion.

ARMADILLO: When we saw that a window had been left open, we crawled right through, hoping for some entertainment.

ALICE: Did you say you came in through a window?

ARMADILLO: What? Speak up!

TWIN 1: *(As the first gentleman caller takes center stage, and takes a dramatic pose.)* This is Mr. August Sedition, the author of ALL KINDS OF STORIES FOR YOUNG FOLK, AND THE MORAL LESSONS WE CAN DRAW FROM THEM.

GENTLEMAN 1: *(Very affected.)* I call this poem SOME THINGS I LIKE, AND WHY I LIKE THEM:

Strawberries, strawberries, strawberries  
Taste ever so much better than raspberries  
They rest on your tongue  
Like a scholar, among  
The pen sets and stationeries.

Parapets, parapets, parapets  
Are so much more pleasant than cigarettes  
While the hookah and cigar  
Has brought on catarrh  
And tends to leave ashes in the marinates.

*(The other poets, and the sisters, applaud.)*

VAMP: Well, that hardly qualifies as a poem at all, does it?

RHINO: No, I don't think it does. It was closer to a nursery rhyme, or a cradle song, and seemed very childish to me.

ARMADILLO: What?

ALICE: I thought it was rather fine. I find I have the same preferences myself, and I don't see why they shouldn't be the subject of a rhyme.

TWIN 2: *(As the second gentleman takes the stage, and poses.)* Mr. Basil Ellingsworth, whose play MY BROTHER'S VIRTUOUS WIFE is now in its seventh year of sold out booking at the Square Bottoms Town Hall Theater.

GENTLEMAN 2: *(Very affected.)* This one I call THE DETAILS OF THE ACCIDENT:

Do not trust the witnesses  
And do not drink their brandy  
Their scalpels may not be obvious  
But they've always got one handy.

Record their answers carefully  
And check their stories twice  
But caution! When the lights go out  
Or the incisions will be precise.

*(Polite applause. The Vamp presses her hand to her forehead, suffering greatly.)*

VAMP: This is really quite draining, how much more of this do we have to take?

RHINO: He's got it all backwards, as I see it. There's nothing the matter with one or two cuts made in the police force, as long as they're made intelligently, and with good humor.

ARMADILLO: Speak up! Speak louder!

ALICE: That didn't seem at all back to front to me. I had an uncle in law enforcement, and he always told me that the least likely suspect was usually the guilty one, and if you turned your back on him, you were likely to get a knife in your side.

TWIN 1: (*Gentleman three takes stage center.*) Mr. Douglas Hoffenstuger, whose non-fiction collection of essays OUR HORRIBLE ANIMAL KINGDOM was the subject of last month's literary club discussion.

GENTLEMAN 3: (*Very affected.*) I call this poem POORER REWARDS BY FAR:

Horses in the winter  
Carriages in the summer  
Such for the life  
Of the whisky drummer.

Fever in the autumn  
Coffin come the spring  
Such for the man who  
Makes the churchbells ring.

(*Polite applause.*)

VAMP: Moralizing, yet? I don't know how much more of this I can take, it's really too much!

RHINO: I can't imagine what he was thinking when he wrote that. The meter is all off.

ARMADILLO: Stop whispering! You're conspiring against me; I know it!

ALICE: I think you're just being picky. I've often felt the most deserving are treated the most unkindly, while the wicked prosper unjustly.

TWIN 2: (*The fourth gentleman takes his place.*) And last of all, Major Richard C. Dunswick, of Dunswick and Crew Publishing, which produces bimonthly the literary anthology MY HAT'S OFF TO YOU, GOOD SIR!

GENTLEMAN 4: This poem I call AN ACCOUNT OF THE VICTORY OF OUR NAVY OVER THE HUNS:

Unexpected it was, the attack by the Huns  
The spring of seven and two  
The captain was willing, and able to fight  
And urged on as much from his crew.

*Dive, men, Dive!* cried the captain  
As the water levels grew  
*But this is not a submersible!*  
Replied his frightened crew

*So fight!* He said, and fight they did  
On ship, and then canoe  
But the captain was quite cut in half  
And devoured, with his crew

But the Huns, it is said, grew quite ill  
From the officers they'd turned to brew  
And the captain, he got his revenge  
And his shipmates, who'd sullied the stew.

*(Polite applause.)*

VAMP: It's gone too far, really! Let me get my coat!

RHINO: But I haven't finished my drink, and how long can they go on? I'm sure the whole beastly affair will be over before you can shake a stick.

ARMADILLO: Were you speaking to me? Don't call me a beast, Docktor!

ALICE: I have to say you are unfair in criticizing the party like this, when you're here uninvited, eating their foods, and drinking their drinks.

RHINO: But, maid, that's the only time we feel completely free to criticize. If we had been invited, we would have to compliment the hostesses, and talk about how well things were going.

ALICE: It still seems like you're just taking things, and fussing about them, and not contributing.

VAMP: *(Giggling.)* The girl is right. Maybe I should get up there and read one of my poems.

RHINO: A very good idea. What's that thing you've been dabbling with all week? This may be the perfect opportunity to debut your new essay in blank verse.

ARMADILLO: A day in Frank's purse? Is that what you said?

ALICE: That sounds like a fine idea.

*(The vamp now crosses to the center stage until she's in front of the gentleman callers. She poses dramatically, produces a piece of paper.)*

VAMP: *(Very affected.)* I call my poem A RIFLE IN SOMEONE ELSE'S ANATOMY:

I've become fascinated by the

Military pamphlets warning of the  
Dangers of social diseases, and I've  
Attempted to use make-up to mimic  
Their illustrations, with my lipstick  
Smudged to represent a canker sore,  
Or some slight application of rouge  
To look like gout. Sometimes I draw  
Tiny, bold geometric patterns on my  
forehead with eye-liner and tell  
People it's Carposis Sarcoma.

*(The Vamp finishes and the gentleman callers crowd around her, applauding.)*

GENTLEMAN 4: I was quite taken with your work, dear woman, it moved me in ways I found entirely unexpected.

GENTLEMAN 3: I had a friend once who wrote in a similar manner, but he was expelled from the Writer's Society for insinuating mature language into a book of stories for children.

*(The Rhino and the Armadillo begin to move about the room, taking the furnishings and stashing them in the children's buggy.)*

RHINO: *(Inspecting an elephant rifle.)* Oh, say! This is quite the specimen of a shooting machine.

ALICE: *(Puzzled.)* I don't understand it. I thought that was a nasty little poem, why are they simply *fawning* over the woman like that?

RHINO: This is the way it always is. Put a woman in black stockings and have her mumble something about her internals and the way they work, and the men in the room absolutely lose control.

ARMADILLO: That is so typical.

ALICE: Why? Why is that typical?

ARMADILLO: Sorry? I didn't hear a word you just said.

*(The Rhino and Armadillo return to their thieving, while the twins push their way over to the Vamp.)*

TWIN 1: Do I KNOW you, woman? I don't RECALL your name on the invite list.

TWIN 2: In point of fact, I don't recall you AT ALL. Which MEANS you shouldn't be here!

RHINO: *(Holding up an antique.)* Such a fine vase, such a beautiful vase! *(He stashes it in the buggy.)*



GENTLEMAN 2: (*To the Twins.*) Who is your fascinating friend, dear sisters, and why have you been hiding her from us?

GENTLEMAN 1: We must all get together sometime, and do something, and make an afternoon of it. Wouldn't that be grand!

VAMP: You're all so swell, you gentlemen are all so nice! Do you mean it?

ARMADILLO: (*Examining a statuette*) Such a lovely bit of sculpture, so pretty! (*He stashes it in the buggy.*)

TWIN 1: Why, this is too much! She's just STEALING our thunder!

TWIN 2: I must have this BITTER WOMAN out of my house AT ONCE.

VAMP: (*To gentlemen.*) You gentlemen are embarrassing me with your attentions. Do go on!

RHINO: It's time for us to be going, woman! Our business here is done.

VAMP: What, so soon? But I've just made so many new friends.

GENTLEMAN 3: You can't go yet. The party's just getting started, and you must stay for another drink!

GENTLEMAN 4: I need another, too. Somebody's drunk the wine right out of my glass when I wasn't looking!

GENTLEMAN 1: We have more poetry you might care to listen to, whole sheaves of our writing! Say you'll stay!

GENTLEMAN 2: There's no liquor left at all, somebody's drunk it!

(*A hush falls on the room and then:*)

ALL GENTLEMEN: (*In unison.*) We won't stand for it!

VAMP: No, things have gone rapidly downhill here, and the sooner we leave the better off we'll be. If you gentlemen would be so kind as to walk me to the door, I might be talked into showing you a bit of leg. (*All exit, except the twins and Alice.*)

TWIN 1: (*Mournfully.*) That won't DO! What has happened to our wonderful PARTY? Will we never be the social butterflies we HOPED to be?

TWIN 2: Steady, sister. Today may be in ruins, but Southern women are made of STERN STUFF, and we shall rise again. What is it that they say about tomorrow?

TWIN 1: That . . . it's another day?

- TWIN 2: Another day, yes. That SEEMS to follow, that doesn't seem out of order at all.
- TWIN 1: No, that seems to follow PERFECTLY. And after that, one WISHES, will be yet ANOTHER day.
- TWIN 2: I should certainly HOPE so, or there would never be enough time to do what NEEDS doing.
- ALICE: Well, I won't be doing anything else after today, I can tell you that. If there is anything that needs doing, and you want me to do it, you'd better tell me now.
- TWIN 1: We have NOTHING more for you. You've certainly SPOILED everything else, and we're not INSANE enough to give you ANOTHER opportunity to make a ruin of things!
- TWIN 2: We shall certainly be complaining to the SERVICE. Your upcoming marriage is NOT an excuse for your SHODDINESS on the job!
- ALICE: I've tried to tell you, you've got the wrong girl. I'm not marrying today.
- TWIN 1: And I don't BLAME the groom for backing out. He would have to be an utter LUNATIC to want a girl like you for his bride!
- TWIN 2: A girl like you would make a CRIMINAL of a housekeeper, and a man's home might very well become BOOBY-TRAPPED by your incompetence.
- TWIN 1: I want you OUT, now!
- TWIN 2: Take your things, and GO at once!
- ALICE: I'd be only too happy to, and good-by to you! I'll go off with the others; they had the right idea about leaving quickly. (*Alice exits, fuming.*) Why, of all the nerve! Pushing me around, dressing me up like I was a paper doll, making me into a servant girl! It's a wonder somebody didn't get hit, and it's an even greater wonder I didn't do the hitting! (*Looking around.*) I hope that I can find the others. They seem to get around this maze pretty well, and maybe they've seen my Dinah. (*Calling, and walking.*) Hello? Oh, hello?

# The Anarchist's Wedding

*(The three intruders move briskly in the hallway)*

ARMADILLO: What? Where did you say we were going?

RHINO: To the wedding, you monster!

ARMADILLO: What? What?

VAMP: The WEDDING! Oh, this won't do, his disease has worsened. We must get him an ear trumpet, or something!

ARMADILLO: Don't talk so low! You're conspiring against me, I know you are!

*(The three disappear into the Cafe Appolinaire. Alice comes around the corner, changing out of the maid's garment)*

ALICE: Wait! Wait for me! I was hoping you could help me!

*(Alice enters into the cafe. It is set with several small tables, like a European bistro, but empty and very dirty. The three intruders have seated themselves at the far end of the room, are reading papers.)*

RHINO: There is a very good story in this one about the riots in the Malaise region.

VAMP: Oh, but you should see this bit about the famines on the Dark Continent.

ARMADILLO: This piece on the coastal floods on the Southern Islands is quite smashing, really.

VAMP: Did you say, floods?

ARMADILLO: What?

RHINO: It's a savage world, my father used to tell me. Disaster and ruin at every corner, and no-one there to pick up the pieces.

VAMP: No-one except us.

RHINO: Well, someone has to. Otherwise it would all be waste, and decay. We serve our purpose, and there's nothing wrong with the little profit we make.

ARMADILLO: What? Speak up!

VAMP: It's a hard life, a hard life, and harder that we must go it alone. Alone. Alone.  
(*She glances up, sees Alice at the door.*) We have company.

ARMADILLO: (*Echoing the Vamp.*) Alone. Alone! ALONE!

VAMP: I said, we have company!

ARMADILLO: What? Aren't we alone?

VAMP: (*Rising, crossing to Alice.*) You were at the house.

ALICE: I was the maid.

VAMP: You followed us.

ALICE: I have questions.

ARMADILLO: Did she say she has questions?

RHINO: She said she has questions.

ARMADILLO: How sweet. Ah, youth!

RHINO: She does seem quite young.

VAMP: How old are you, dear?

ALICE: Just now sixteen, ma'am.

VAMP: Sixteen isn't so young. At sixteen, I had names for each individual finger on my hand.

ALICE: Oh, I know that one! (*Stretching out her hand.*) Tommy Thumbkin, Billy Winkie, Long Duster, Betsy Bedlam, Little Bob.

VAMP: Oh, you Christian children, how sweet! Where I come from, the names are a little different. (*Stretching out her hand.*) This one, the oppressor. This one, the gentleman. This one, the mad dervish. This one, the long man. And my thumb we call Mr. Thick.

ALICE: How unusual. Where do you come from?

VAMP: (*Laughing, throwing her arms around Alice.*) What a darling child! Such a curious mind! Ask questions, girl; that's the only way you'll learn anything!

ARMADILLO: What did she ask?

RHINO: She asked where we come from. Little maid, we are from three separate, very distant lands. I come from a ghastly jungle, this little beast comes from a dreadful swamp, and the woman comes from an unpleasant and crowded city.

ALICE: Why did you leave?

RHINO: Oh, you know how things work. You try to make a go of something in one place, and it doesn't work out, so you take it to another . . .

ARMADILLO: I was asked to leave. Nobody could stand me.

VAMP: I was asked to leave. People were afraid of me.

RHINO: (*Sighing*) We were asked to leave. Our type is never too popular, you see, because stranger's belongings sometimes wind up in our suitcases.

VAMP: Or stranger's husbands sometimes wind up in our staterooms.

ARMADILLO: Or bits of our bodies wind up in stranger's suitcases.

ALICE: Oh, how terrible for you!

VAMP: That's not terrible, that's disgusting.

ARMADILLO: Don't be cruel to me! My life is pain; my heart is blood!

RHINO: For what it's worth, though, we've found each other. We've got our own ways, you know, we've created a little society of three. We've got our own languages, our own songs, and our own dances . . .

ALICE: Oh, I love dances! Everybody wanted me as a partner at the cotillion at Christ's church, and they all commented on how well I knew the steps!

VAMP: You can dance, maid? Why, that gives us enough for the Elephant walk!

RHINO: Why, yes it does, we've always been short by one. And how fortunate that I brought my pump organ with me!

ALICE: The Elephant Walk? I've never learned to Elephant Walk.

VAMP: Oh, it's very easy. The armadillo can do it, and he's missing most of his toes! Just put your hand to your nose like this. (*The vamp demonstrates, and Alice tries it.*) Now push your other hand through the opening, like this, to make it look like a trunk. (*Alice does so.*) And now you walk like this. (*The vamp demonstrates, and Alice follows*) This is it! This is the Elephant Walk!

ARMADILLO: Sing that song, Docktor, the one about the jungle you come from! And loud, this time, so I can hear!

ALICE: It sounds frightfully savage.

VAMP, ARMADILLO, RHINO: Yes!

ALICE: Was it filled with wild men, with spears, who devoured each other?

VAMP, ARMADILLO, RHINO: Yes!

ALICE: How exciting! Is there lost treasure, emeralds hidden behind the eyes of giant ivory idols, and terrible traps?

VAMP, ARMADILLO, RHINO: Yes!

ALICE: How extraordinary! Please sing the song, I do so want to hear it!

RHINO: *(Puts on his pump organ. Playing and singing: THEY NO LONGER SIN LIKE THEY ONCE SINNED WITH US.)*

I stayed two nights with the cannibals  
And dined with them on chimpansee  
I was arrested and then beaten  
They claimed I stole their recipe  
I was saved by a Qalif  
With a harem of dancing brides  
He gave us many gifts of treasures  
And we sold them to our guides  
His anger was quite terrible  
And we fled to save our skin  
Which would have been cleaned neatly  
And then hung up at the gym  
Now I hear boasts of peccadilloes  
And I laugh at them as frivolous  
Because, you see, they no longer sin  
Like they once sinned with us.

ARMADILLO: Why does he say “we?” Did I participate in any of this?

VAMP: You were there, you were asleep.

RHINO: We sailed with a merchant  
Who was headed for the coast  
He insisted that we join him  
With sherry, for a toast  
He lifted up his glass and said  
“I drink to my lares and Penates”  
He hadn’t realized, of course  
We’d stashed them in our shipping crates  
He found out soon enough, I’m afraid  
And made us walk the plank  
But I already knew what I needed:  
His combination, his safe, his bank.  
Now I hear boasts of peccadilloes  
And I laugh at them as frivolous  
Because, you see, they no longer sin  
Like they once sinned with us.

ARMADILLO: I don't remember any of this! Is this some kind of trick!

VAMP: You were there! You were asleep!

RHINO: I was asked to join a college  
As a professor, and then teach  
High Mathematics to the children  
In a schoolhouse near the beach  
My best pupils were an Archduke's son  
And a banker's pretty daughter  
The ransom was refused, and so  
They perished in the water  
We left, of course, quite quickly then  
And I left behind my pipe  
Some things you have to purchase  
But others it's best to swipe  
Now I hear boasts of peccadilloes  
And I laugh at them as frivolous  
Because, you see, they no longer sin  
Like they once sinned with us.

ARMADILLO: You can't fool me! I'm not buying it!

VAMP: Fool you, monster, why would we fool you?

ARMADILLO: Since my disease has worsened, you've wanted to get rid of me! You've poisoned my water, you've formed a cabal against me, I know you have! I understand when you're whispering! *(He produces the hunting rifle from the buggy.)* You shan't have me, do you hear!

RHINO: Put down the blunderbuss, you horrid thing. In your condition, the recoil would probably send bits of you flying everywhere.

ARMADILLO: That would suit me just fine! My life is pain; my heart is blood!

ALICE: *(Frightened)* I think he means to shoot it off.

VAMP: Nonsense. He gets into moods, and imagines plots. His medicine puts him to sleep, so hisses misses all the fun, and then he grows angry with us. *(To Armadillo.)* Put that away, or I'll spin you! You know how that makes you sick to your stomach!

ARMADILLO: No, I won't put it down! I need to protect myself!

VAMP: Then you spin.

*(She takes the buggy, spins it. The armadillo shrieks.)*

ARMADILLO: Oh, stop! You know I can't stand this!

VAMP: Your imagination has gotten out of hand, making you see enemies where there are none, and it's time you learned a lesson!

ARMADILLO: Stop, please! I'm becoming dizzy! Oh, I feel faint!

*(In his hands the gun goes off, firing between Alice and the rhino and shooting a hole in the wall. The recoil sends the buggy skittering across the room, where it crashes into the opposite wall. After a moment, a body collapses into the doorway from outside. It is the YOUNG GIRL IN WEDDING GOWN; she has been shot through the wall.)*

RHINO: *(Rushing to her, terrified.)* It's the bride! Oh god, monster, you have murdered the bride!

ARMADILLO: What?

RHINO: Oh, you have murdered us too! Once the anarchists find out, they will bomb us, or take knives to us! You fool; you've done us in!

ARMADILLO: What's that you say, Docktor? Are you blaming me for this? The girl shouldn't have been lurking about!

VAMP: She was probably fleeing. If I had to marry one of those villains, I would flee as well!

ALICE: Oh, this is terrible! Oh, I know that girl! I met her before; she was drinking gin. She told me she had a horror of her wedding night!

RHINO: Now I have a horror of her wedding night! It will certainly be my last night on earth! What will we do?

VAMP: Clean up the mess! They don't need to know it will happen!

ARMADILLO: Tell them she fled, Docktor! They can't blame us!

RHINO: But they can, and they will, because they're anarchists. If the bride is not produced, there will be violence!

ARMADILLO: If only there was some other girl.

VAMP: Some other girl we could put under the wedding veil. Nobody would know the difference until after the ceremony, and we could get away!

RHINO: A substitute bride! It might work; it just might work.

ALICE: *(Realizing they are looking at her.)* If you're thinking what I think you're thinking, it won't be done. I have no plans to marry today; particularly to a man I've never met.

RHINO: My dear, the decision is quite out of your hands.



VAMP: I found out a long time ago the cost of a young woman's curiosity. It's time you did the same.

ARMADILLO: I've put holes in one person this night. I'd be willing to do so again to save my skin, such as it is. *(He points the gun at Alice.)*

ALICE: *(Despairing.)* I've been shanghaied.

*They exit together, dragging the body with them. Moments later, three ANARCHIST GENTLEMEN enter. Two take seats at the tables, and the third crosses to the bar, and gathers up bottles of wine. He throws it to one gentleman, who tosses it to the other, and they continue to juggle like this. Now the GROOM enters, very nervous, with his BEST MAN.)*

GROOM: Where is she, Hugo? Shouldn't she be here by now? And where is my father?

BEST MAN: You will have your bride, you don't need to worry. She wouldn't dare cross us. Your father will be late; his ship is still docking.

GROOM: I've never felt like this, Hugo, I'm as frightened as an ox going to slaughter! Where is my bride? *(He produces a pistol, waves it in the air.)* If something has gone wrong, blood will be spilled, and I don't care whose!

*(The gentlemen anarchists HURRAH and leap to their feet, producing pistols of their own and shouting manifestoes.)*

GENTLEMAN 1: I demand a world in which automation takes the place of human machinations! I demand a machine that will do my digestion for me!

GENTLEMAN 2: I have made a provision in my will that my skull be decorated with gold leaf, and my eye-sockets filled with marmalade. I may not be a handsome man, but I will be an exquisite corpse.

GENTLEMAN 3: The only political gestures I make are specific and very obscene!

BEST MAN: *(Holding up a wine glass)* I propose a toast, to our young groom, my friends. We kidnapped a bride, we broke into a church, and we're bringing his father in by steamship! A better wedding no man can ask for!

ALL: Bumps! *(They drink.)*

GENTLEMAN 1: *(Spitting his drink out, disturbed)* Steamship, did you say, the father's coming in by steamship??

BEST MAN: First class, thanks to a murdered jeweler in Vichlovia. Docking number 409, the PNEUMATOLOGIST.

GENTLEMAN 2: *(Spitting his drink out)* Number 409, the PNEUMATOLOGIST? I wish I had known, oh woe is me! If only we hadn't found that bag of gunpowder!

GROOM: What is it, what's the matter?

GENTLEMAN 3: *(Spitting his drink out.)* But, we've blown it up. We thought some fireworks were in order, we thought we'd have a spot of fun, and now we've ruined everything. *(An explosion is heard.)* The father is dead; the wedding is ruined!

BEST MAN: But no, you're mistaken! Here's the father now!

*(The FATHER OF THE GROOM enters the room, coughing, his coat blackened with soot. He carries with him a tailor's mannequin, dressed like a woman.)*

FATHER: Fireworks! You boys think of everything!

GROOM: *(Delighted)* Father! But how did you survive?

FATHER: I can't say. One minute I was on the ship, drawing into port. The next second there was a concussion and your mother and I found ourselves airborne. We landed outside, on a group of chimney sweeps, and I think they broke our fall. Haven't you got a kiss for your mother?

GROOM: Dear mama. *(He leans down, kisses the mannequin.)* She's looking well.

FATHER: Yes, well, I just had her repainted. Your mother's beauty treatments are driving me to the poorhouse, but for your wedding she must look her best.

BEST MAN: *(Sotto voice.)* He still maintains the mannequin is his wife?

GROOM: *(Sotto voice.)* Yes, his madness grows worse. The last man who pointed out that mama is a tailor's dummy he pulled a knife on.

BEST MAN: *(Sotto voice.)* Then I shall leave him to his fantasies. *(To the father.)* Welcome, honored sir! And may I say your wife looks beautiful today.

FATHER: Well, the rats had at her a few months ago, and bit off some of her fingers, so I had new ones carved for her. At a considerable cost, too. My blood boils, I cannot contain my rage! I will see blood spilled today!

*(The father pulls out a pistol, and waves it in the air. The other gentlemen HURRAH and leap to their feat, shouting manifestoes.)*

GENTLEMAN 1: I found a half-eaten sandwich in one of my shoes and several books in my collection that I had never bought. My room now smells of cigars, and I don't smoke. I've been receiving threatening letters in a language I do not understand. I begin to suspect I have a roommate.

GENTLEMAN 2: I have been training my parakeet to cry out "Help me, he beats me." I bind my books in sandpaper. I have a player piano that will not stop, even though it is out of tune. I want my house to be uncomfortable.

GENTLEMAN 3: I demand the right to pass water in different colors! I insist that rioting in the streets is a full-time profession, and should be paid better! I wish I knew the name of the woman who cleans the sponges at the Turkish bath!

ALL: Bumps! (*They drink.*)

FATHER: I can't stand here and discuss politics, my wife's hinges will rust. I demand the bride, where is the bride? If she is not brought to me, I will fire randomly into a crowd!

(*Dressed in the bride's dress and veil, Alice is brought in by the three intruders.*)

RHINO: Here she is!

ARMADILLO: We've brought her to you!

VAMP: (*Sotto voice, to Alice*) Keep the flowers up, over the bullet hole, maid. Keep your mouth shut, and you'll be fine.

GROOM: (*Delighted, crossing to Alice.*) My bride! And you look so swell in your wedding veil. Father — come meet my future wife!

(*The father crosses to Alice, staring at her. He prods her, and then turns to his son.*)

FATHER: Not as well made as your mother, boy, but it's difficult to find good craftsmanship these days. She's quiet, though, and that's always a good thing.

GROOM: She is quiet, I've never seen her this quiet. Is something the matter?

BEST MAN: It's nerves, a new bride should be afraid. When I married, the girl wouldn't speak for three months.

GENTLEMAN 1: (*Laughing*) My bride filled three whole notebooks with the words "I despise the beast that claims to be my husband."

GENTLEMAN 2: (*Laughing*) My bride had fits of screaming, and tried to run off almost daily.

GENTLEMAN 3: (*Laughing*) My bride tried to dispose herself with poison we had set out for the rats.

GROOM: Oh, but I couldn't take that, my heart would be broken! (*To Alice.*) Tell me you don't despise me, you won't scream and run away, you won't try to do yourself in. (*He takes Alice's hands, revealing the bullet hole, and she pulls her hands back over it.*) Are you angry with me, my beloved? I know it was wrong for me to kidnap you, in the way I did, and blackmail you into marriage, the way I did. But when I called the agency, and they sent you to take my dictations, I knew you were the woman I wanted for my own. My behavior has been thickheaded, but my heart is in the right place. I promise to be the best husband possible, and give you the best life I can. You'll see; the wedding will be a smashing affair! I've even hired Rose Fedelia and some skeletons in caftans to sing you melodies!

ALICE:           Rose Fedelia . . .? Skeletons in caftans . . .?

*(Now, through the door, comes Rose Fedelia and the instrumentalists followed in a parade line by Rose's four-person band. Octavio Blume enters behind them, strumming a ukulele.)*

ROSE:           *(Singing: YOU'RE IN A GHASTLY MOOD MY DEAR.)*

I thought I would see you  
I thought you'd be pleased  
But you say nothing to me  
You weep and you sneeze  
And hide in the corner  
And you cough and you wheeze  
You're in a ghastly mood my dear  
You're in a ghastly mood my dear.

We went to a party  
You started a fight  
You leapt on the hostess  
And started to bite  
The woman was hospitalized  
And in surgery all night  
Where are your manners, girl  
Was that polite?  
You're in a ghastly mood my dear  
You're in a ghastly mood my dear.

I sent you to Sutton  
To have them examine your brain  
They needed some cuttings  
But you cried out in pain  
They declared you ill tempered  
But otherwise sane  
It cost me a fortune  
And I spent it in vain.  
You're in a ghastly mood my dear  
You're in a ghastly mood my dear.

*(The music stops, and the anarchist gentleman rise to their feet, applauding and BRAVOing.)*

GROOM:       *(Excitedly)* Did you like it? *(Alice shrugs)* You must tell me what you think of it, I must know. *(Alice shrugs)* I had it commissioned for the wedding, by Octavio Blume! Why won't you speak, why won't you tell me your opinion??

ALICE:       *(Unable to contain herself)* I thought it was monstrous! Is this the kind of music you play for a girl at her wedding?

ROSE:       *(To Octavio)* The girl is right, Octavio. I don't know what you were thinking when you composed that song.

OCTAVIO: Does that voice sound familiar to you, Rose?

GROOM: (*Crushed*) You didn't like it?

ALICE: I won't stand it, do you hear me? I won't stand for another minute of this!

OCTAVIO: Where do I know that voice from?

ROSE: Octavio, why don't you go back to writing those nice love songs, like *I'm Going to Woo You With a Telegram* or *Be Mine Be Mine Be Mine*?

(*Octavio crosses the room, slowly, toward Alice. He stares at her, and then pulls up her veil, revealing her face.*)

OCTAVIO: Did I tell you, Rose? It is the saboteur!

ROSE: Alice?

GROOM: An imposter? Where is my bride?

ALICE: She's better off than if she had married you, I know that, pointing pistols and frightening people.

GROOM: (*Outraged*) Blood will be spilled! Brother will kill brother!

ALL: (*Producing their handguns*) Bumps!

(*And they begin to shoot. Alice turns on her heels, flees to the door. She passes Rose, who calls out to her.*)

ROSE: Run, girl, and don't look back! Run, little Alice, and hide yourself!

(*And Alice flees down the hallway.*)

# Vinous Grapes

*(Alice rushes into a room and climbs into a bed that is there, wrapping herself in the sheets, terrified. The lights are out.)*

ALICE: They couldn't have seen me duck in here, could they? Oh, I do hope they haven't, they were calling for blood! I haven't much to begin with, and what I have I couldn't well do without!

*(There are the sounds of commotion in the hallway)*

ALICE: They have found me, oh what will I do? I can see them approaching now; I can see the light shine of their pistols in the dark! I'm done for, oh help!

*(Flickering lights approach, but they are just candles on a birthday cake. UNCLE THOMAS steps into Alice's bedroom, with AUNT VERA and AUNT CHELSEA.)*

THOMAS: What's all this noisemaking and hullabaloo?

ALICE: Uncle Thomas?

VERA: *(Lighting the room.)* From the sounds of things, Alice was asleep, and dreaming.

CHELSEA: It must have been a horrid dream, to have her shouting like that! If I had that dream, I would be very happy to be woken up!

THOMAS: And with cake, and presents, at that!

ALICE: Why, I am in my own bedroom! I thought my eyes were fooling me for a second, but now I'm quite sure.

VERA: Of course it's your bedroom, Alice. It couldn't very well be someone else's, could it?

CHELSEA: I knew she should never have eaten that demon rarebit for supper, Vera. It always causes her to imagine the strangest things.

ALICE: It's such a relief to be called Alice again, Aunt Chelsea. For the longest time people preferred I was somebody else. And it's so nice to be back in my room, with no one insisting it's someplace else. *(She bursts into tears.)*

THOMAS: Of course it's your room, Alice, we would never have found you otherwise! When I seek someone out, I certainly don't look for them in someone else's room!

VERA: Why, I do believe our Alice is crying!

CHELSEA: Is this any way for a young woman to act? Tears are for children, little Alice, and you are no longer a child, now that you're sixteen.

ALICE: I was afraid I'd missed my birthday, I had the queerest dream that Uncle Thomas wasn't going to come at all!

THOMAS: Well, I'm here, and that settles that! I promised you a swell surprise, and you must think terrible things of me to believe I would not keep my promise!

*(Uncle Thomas produces a little painted box, hands it to Alice. She opens it.)*

ALICE: My! I don't know what to make of these, although they must be something quite wonderful. They seem to be a bunch of costume grapes. *(Suddenly, surprised.)* Oh, they're made of rubber, and they're full of liquid! I got some on my fingers!

VERA: Thomas, what the devil have you bought your niece?

CHELSEA: What hijinks is this, another of your practical jokes?

THOMAS: No hijinks, no practical jokes, these grapes are medicinal. They can be worn as a brooch, and if the girl ever feels fatigued, or has an attack of the vapors, she can put one of the grapes in her mouth and swallow the liquid. *(To Alice.)* Take one, my dear, and discover the secret.

*(Uncle Thomas takes one of the grapes off its stem, and puts it in Alice's mouth. Alice shudders.)*

ALICE: It's got such a strong taste! What is it?

THOMAS: A light brandy, I believe, or a bit of rosé. Each of the grapes contains a different liquor.

VERA: Thomas, that may not be appropriate as a gift for a little girl!

CHELSEA: Alice is still a little bit young for that kind of thing.

THOMAS: What rot, this is medicinal, everybody agrees. It's a roberant, it renews vigor, and you're never too young for that. Besides, I think she rather likes it.

ALICE: *(Taking another grape, then shuddering.)* I wouldn't have thought that I would, but it caught me very much by surprise, and I find that I do. *(Taking another grape.)* These are making me light headed.

VERA: Come, Alice. It's time we take you and your cake downstairs. There's a party waiting for you.

CHELSEA: Everybody wants to see you blow out the candles, and there are many fine looking gifts for you.

*(Alice tries to rise, but is a little off balance. Uncle Thomas takes her arm, and strokes her hair.)*

ALICE: But what about Dinah? I can't leave this room without knowing what happened to Dinah.

THOMAS: You needn't worry, dear. Dinah is downstairs taking care of her kittens; she's been there since I arrived.

ALICE: Oh, and I've been worried to death! And what an adventure I've had, with those anarchists, and the American women with their arms on the wrong side of their body!

VERA: Stop eating those grapes now, dear, you've had quite enough. You're not making any sense at all.

CHELSEA: *(Crossing to the door.)* You may come down for a short while, Alice, but then it's right to bed! You have school tomorrow.

THOMAS: Oh, don't be too strict, Chelsea. After all, it's the girl's sixteenth birthday. If she wants to stay up a little later than usual this once, I think she should be allowed to.

ALICE: You're teaching me all sorts of bad manners, Uncle Thomas. But if there is a party, and cake, and my friends, I would like to be able to spend as much time at it as I can.

THOMAS: *(Extinguishing the lights.)* That's the spirit; that's my Alice! You'll see: we'll have such a splendid time tonight!

*(They all exit, and from outside the room other voices can be heard singing a happy birthday song.)*

**END.**